

Merritt Reservoir

2009 Creel Survey Summary

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission



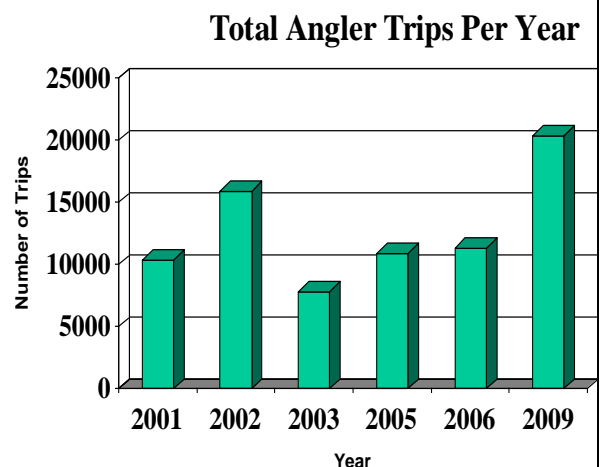
Zac Brashears Fisheries Biologist

A five year angler creel survey is being conducted at Merritt Reservoir. The study is being done by an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. This survey will be run from May 1 until October 31 for the years 2009-2013. During this time anglers are counted and interviewed on twenty randomly selected days per month, fourteen week days and six weekend days. Information gathered from this survey allows fisheries managers to estimate angling pressure, size of fish caught, catch and harvest numbers, and catch rates. This information also allows managers to monitor how certain regulations are working for that water body. An example of this would be the channel catfish daily bag limit which was reduced from 10 to 5 fish at Merritt Reservoir in 2009.

The following text and graphs provide a summary of the creel survey data for 2009 with comparisons to the 2001-2003 and 2005-2006 surveys.

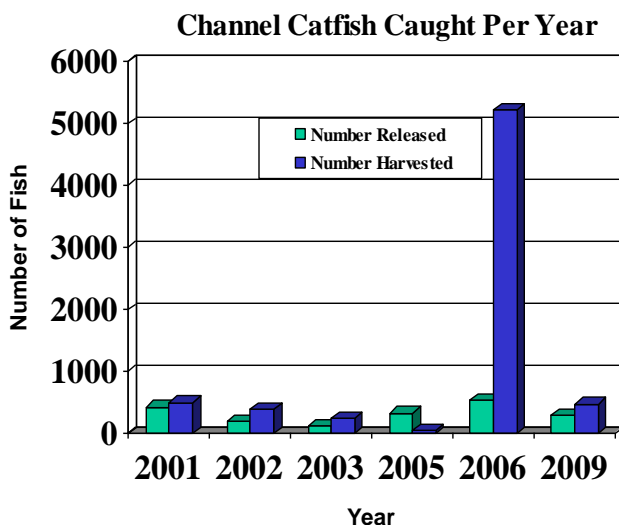
Angler Trips

An estimated 20,342 angler trips were made to Merritt Reservoir in 2009. This is almost double the amount of angler trips in 2006 which was estimated at 11,338 angler trips and is the most angler trips ever recorded. Anglers spent an estimated 125,775 hours fishing with an average of 6.18 hours per trip. Eighty-two percent of the trips were made seeking walleye, twelve percent seeking anything they could catch and the other six percent spent their time seeking channel catfish, northern pike, muskellunge, bluegill, largemouth bass, black crappie, and yellow perch. Anglers from 15 other states (10 percent of the fisherman) and 63 Nebraska counties fished Merritt Reservoir during the survey period.



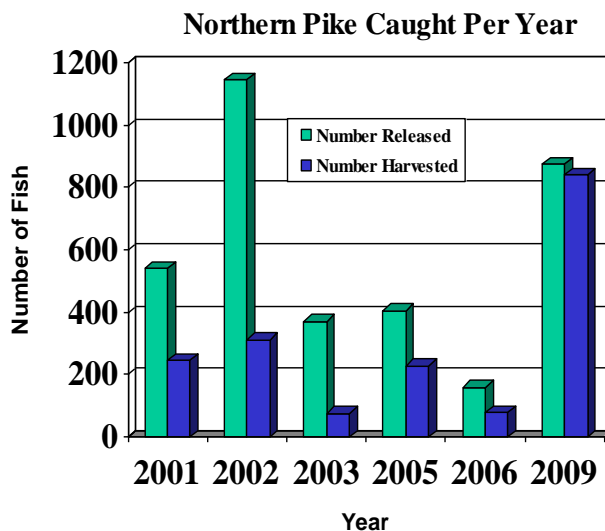
Channel Catfish

The number of channel catfish caught was similar to that of 2001-2005. With the exception of 2006, the number of harvested catfish has been steady since 2001. Total catch for 2009 consisted of 783 fish, with 481 fish harvested and 302 released. The average length of fish harvested was 23.8 inches compared to the 2001-2006 average of 23.3 inches. The catch rate for anglers seeking channel catfish was 0.04 fish per hour and harvest was 0.04 fish per hour.



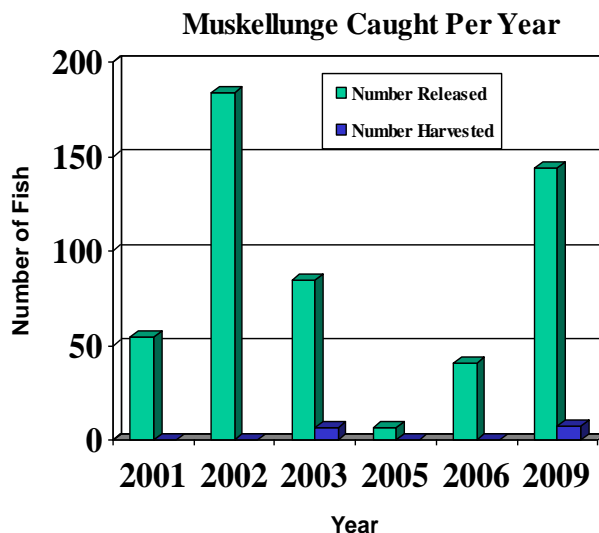
Northern Pike

The northern pike catch in 2009 was the highest ever recorded since 2001 with an estimated 1,718 fish caught. Of those fish 841 were harvested and 877 were released. The average length of pike harvested was 27.9 inches compared to the 2001-2006 average of 25.8 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking northern pike was 0.10 fish per hour and harvest was 0.06 fish per hour.



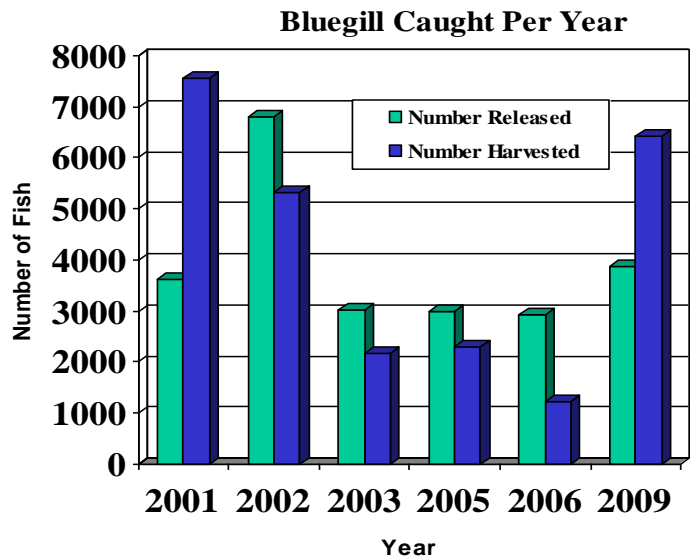
Muskellunge

The muskellunge catch rates for 2009 were the second highest ever recorded since 2001 and on an upward trend since 2005 with an estimated 150 fish caught. Of those fish caught 95% were released and 93% of those fish were less than the 40-inch minimum length limit and could not be legally harvested. Total number of muskellunge harvested was estimated at 7 fish with an average length of 42.9 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking muskellunge was 0.04 fish per hour.



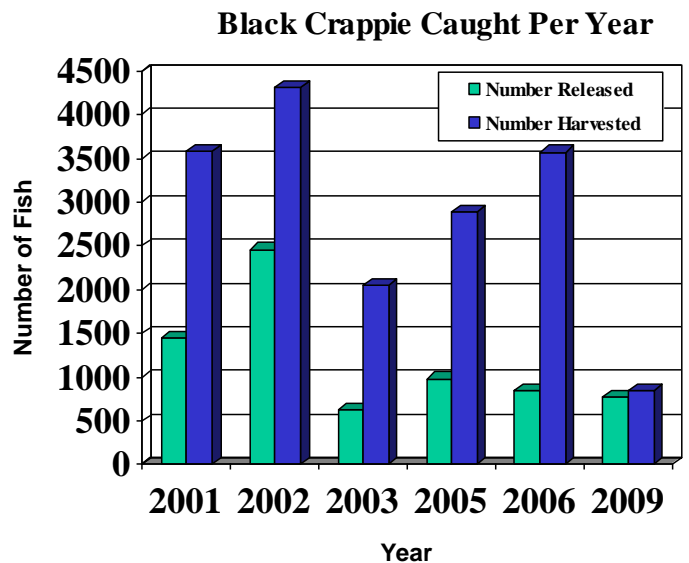
Bluegill

The bluegill catch improved from the past few surveys with a total of 10,287 fish caught. Of those fish caught 6,420 fish were harvested and 3,867 were released. Harvested bluegill averaged 7.2 inches which was very similar to the 2001-2006 average of 7.3 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking bluegill was 0.67 fish per hour and harvest was 0.58 fish per hour.



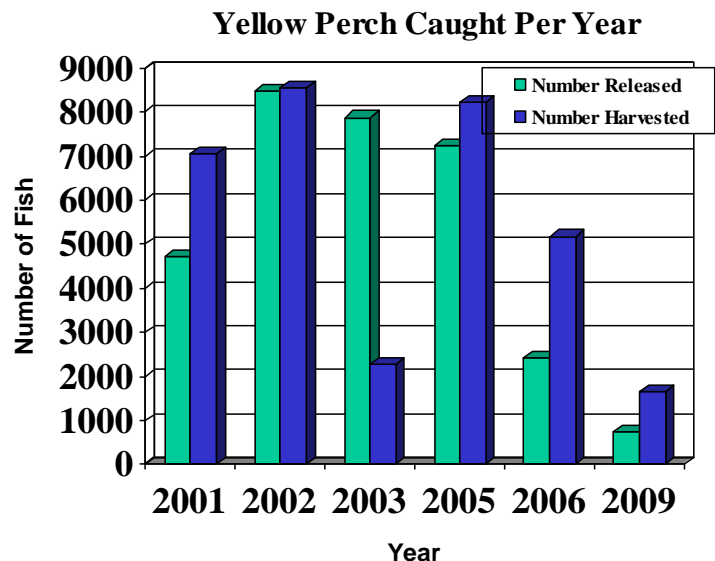
Black Crappie

The black crappie catch was less than previous surveys. A total of 1,620 fish were caught; 846 of those fish were harvested and 774 were released. The average harvested fish was 10.5 inches compared to the 2001-2006 average of 10.1 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking black crappie was 0.09 fish per hour.



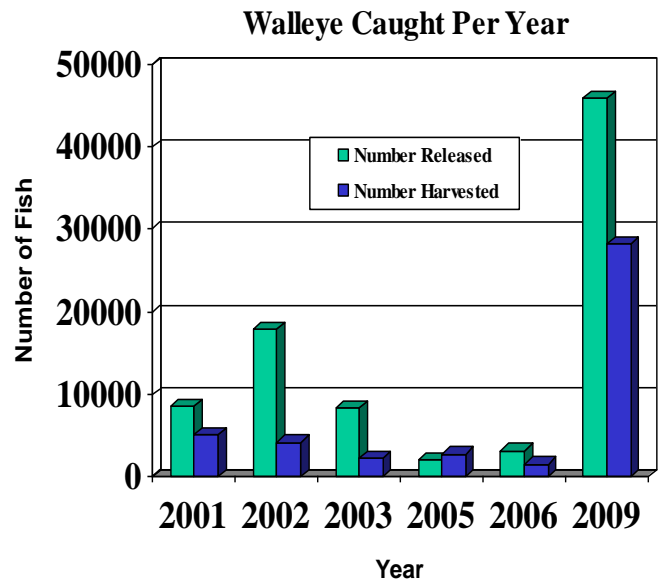
Yellow Perch

The yellow perch catch was less than previous surveys with an estimated catch of 2,399 fish. Sixty-eight percent (1,646) of those fish were harvested and 753 were released. Average size of fish harvested increased to 9.35 inches compared to the 2001-2006 average of 8.8 inches. Catch rates for anglers seeking yellow perch was 0.05 fish per hour.



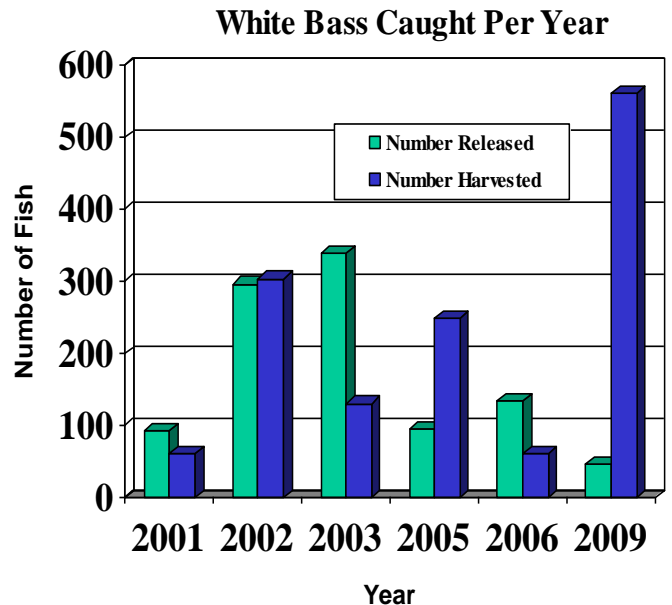
Walleye

The walleye catch during 2009 was the highest ever recorded with an estimated 74,034 fish caught. Sixty-two percent of these fish were released averaged 14.6 inches. The total number of walleye harvested was 28,231 fish and also was the highest ever recorded. The average length of harvested fish was 19.1 inches compared to the 2001-2006 average of 18.2 inches. Anglers seeking walleye caught 0.58 fish per hour and harvested 0.23 fish per hour.



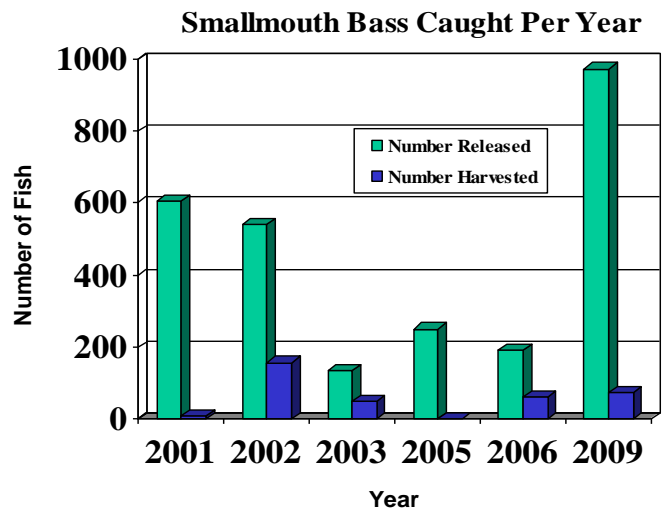
White Bass

Although white bass catch remains low, the 607 fish caught is the highest recorded since 2001. Of those fish caught, 92% were harvested and averaged approximately 16.5 inches in length. Only 47 fish were released during the survey period and those fish averaged 14.6 inches. Very few anglers seek white bass at Merritt Reservoir but if they catch one the chances of it being a master angler are very good.



Smallmouth Bass

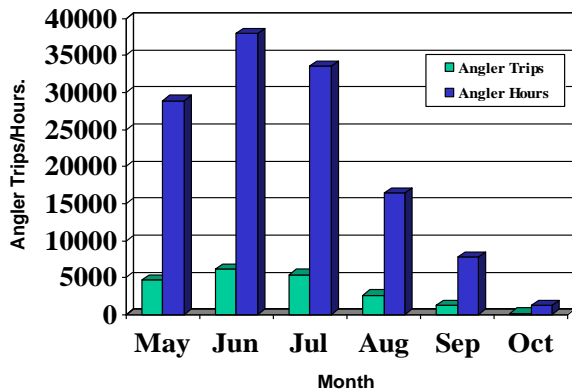
Total catch for smallmouth bass was the highest its been since 2001 with an estimated 1045 fish caught. Approximately 93% of those fish were released and they averaged 8.6 inches in length. Seventy-three fish were harvested.



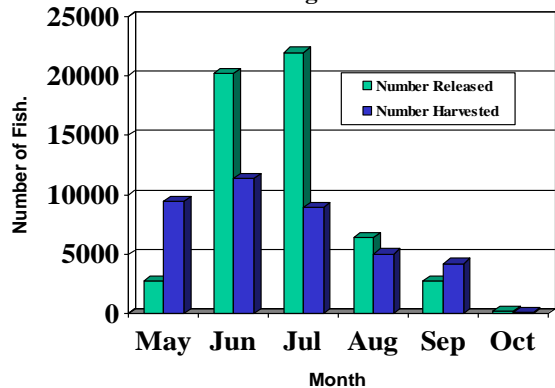
Merritt Reservoir Monthly Estimates

The following graphs show monthly estimates of fishing pressure and angler catch at Merritt Reservoir in 2009. Fishing pressure was fairly consistent from May -July and then tapering off Aug-Oct. Anglers had the best fishing success in June and July. Channel catfish anglers had consistent success from June through September. The majority of the northern pike catch occurred in May. Bluegill catch was highest in August and September. Walleye harvest remained consistent for the Months of May through June with the highest catch happening in July.

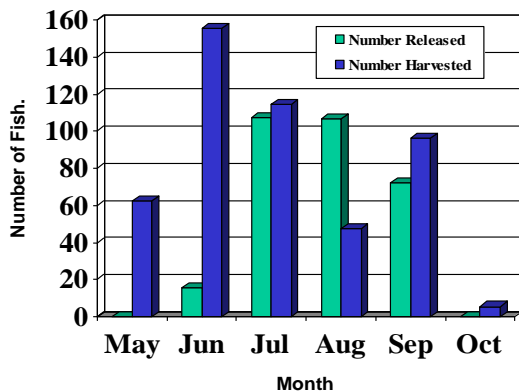
Fishing Pressure Per Month



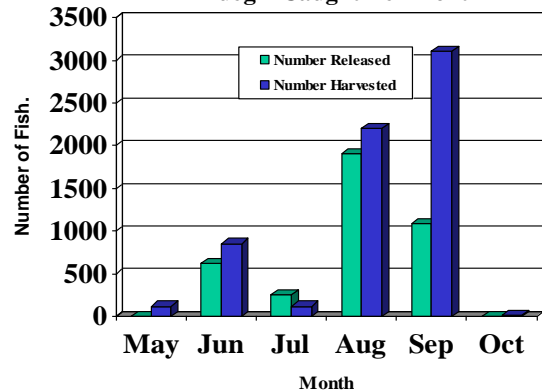
Fishing Pressure Per Month



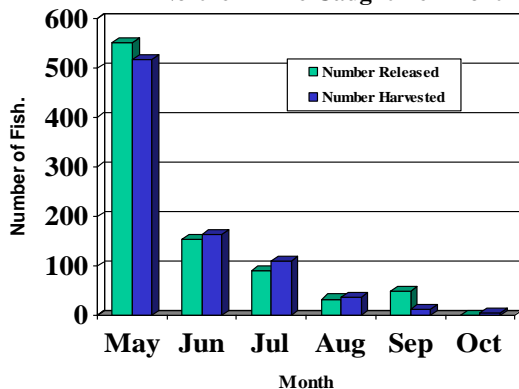
Channel Catfish Caught Per Month



Bluegill Caught Per Month



Northern Pike Caught Per Month



Walleye Caught Per Month

